



SEATTLE CITY COUNCIL | DISTRICT 3

COUNCILMEMBER KSHAMA SAWANT

June 23, 2020

Dear Seattle City Councilmembers:

Last Thursday, I was proud to stand with African-American faith leaders and other faith leaders of color outside New Hope Missionary Baptist Church as [they unveiled their demand that the City of Seattle reverse decades of racist gentrification in the Central District](#) by passing the strongest possible Amazon Tax to fund a massive program of affordable housing in the area, in addition to a citywide expansion of affordable housing and green jobs with priority local hire.

The Central District used to be more than 70 percent black in the 1970s; today, that figure is [less than 18 percent](#). The economic eviction of black households is a direct outcome, as the clergy and I noted at our press conference, of for-profit developers and big banks colluding with the city's political establishment over the decades to systematically push black working-class people out of Seattle's urban core. This racist gentrification has destroyed the very fabric of the community – forcing people out of their homes, away from their friends and neighbors, their churches, grocery stores, community clinics, parks, and schools.

As the streets of Seattle join a nationwide historic uprising against racism and police violence, the clergy called on the political establishment to move beyond rhetoric and commit to a massive plan to build new publicly-owned, permanently-affordable homes, expand Tiny House Villages, and to greatly increase funding for social services, while providing for apprenticeships and jobs for young people, and helping churches build affordable housing on their properties.

The Tax Amazon movement and I wholeheartedly support all of [the faith leaders' demands](#), as we also support the demands of the King County Equity Now Coalition.

The City Council must do more than what's acceptable to big business, acknowledge that the for-profit housing market has been one of the most violent, destructive weapons directed at working-class and poor people of color, and take concrete action.

I urge you to join me and our movement in publicly declaring your support for all of the African-American faith leaders' demands, without reservation, including their demand for the city to enact progressive taxation to raise a minimum of \$500 million/year to meet urgent human needs.

[Please read the full letter from the faith leaders.](#)

As Reverend Willie Seals, pastor of The Christ Spirit Church, said at our press conference, the faith leaders' letter "is the challenge to the City Council as well as to

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Mayor Durkan. You must acknowledge the existence of the persistent and institutional racism that has decimated the Seattle African-American population.”

Rev. Carey Anderson, pastor of Seattle’s **First African Methodist Episcopal Church**, added, “Simply put, if Black Lives Matter, then affordable housing for Black families in the Central District should matter. It was Martin Luther King who said ‘Life’s most important question is – what are you doing for others?’ We are simply asking if we really believe in not the rhetoric, not the slogans, but the fact that Black Lives Matter, then do what’s right, for what’s right.”

The faith leaders’ demands call on the City Council to “Implement a progressive tax to raise a minimum of \$500 million per year” to fund:

- 1,000 new affordable homes in the Central District, especially for historic residents and households displaced over the years by racist gentrification;
- 5,000 new units of permanent supportive housing;
- More Tiny House Villages to house 2,000 currently-unsheltered people;
- Apprenticeship and training opportunities with a focus on youth of color; and,
- \$500 million in bonds for low-income housing construction.

The letter also calls on the City to end the cruel sweeps of homeless encampments; adopt an ordinance that my office will be introducing shortly to allow churches to increase density on church properties to build more low-income housing; and demilitarize the police department and strengthen public oversight.

The fact that the City Council is now moving forward together on a big business Amazon Tax is entirely due to the thousands who have been fighting for the Tax Amazon movement, including black and brown community members and leaders, and many of the faith leaders themselves. Big business is being forced to recognize the tremendous community support for the Amazon Tax. However, the Democrats’ legislation currently falls well short of what the community immediately needs, including what the African-American faith leaders have called for.

The Sawant-Morales Amazon Tax legislation would:

- tax big business at a rate to bring in \$500 million/year, beginning immediately, to fund COVID relief, social housing, and the Green New Deal.
- be a permanent tax with no "sunset clause," because we know that the need for affordable housing and services is not going to magically disappear at some arbitrary date.
- build, according to City Council’s Central Staff, about 10,000 new social homes in the first decade, and create or support 34,000 jobs in that time period.

On the other hand, the Democrats' Amazon Tax legislation would:

- raise \$174 million/year, but only beginning in 2022;
- expire in 2030, before the housing crisis is "over."
- build far fewer homes and create and support fewer jobs than our Tax Amazon legislation.
- will fall short of the community demands, including the just and reasonable demands put forward by the African-American clergy.

I look forward to working with you all in the coming weeks. I will be bringing amendments to greatly strengthen the Amazon Tax legislation being considered by the City Council, and to close its corporate loopholes. I am committed, in all of these discussions, to stand with our community movement in their just demands, and I urge you to join me in endorsing the African-American faith leaders' demands publicly and ensuring they are met in full.

Sincerely,



Councilmember Kshama Sawant